

SOUTH EAST ASIAN FILM & CINEMA STUDIES AT SOAS :

THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

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*Paper presented at the South East Asia Library Group (SEALG) meeting, Maison
Asie-Pacifique, Marseille, 12 July 2008*

Although US and UK films dominate mainstream cinema in Britain, there has been a growing interest in viewing world cinema (also known as national cinema). In the UK context, world cinema covers non-US and UK films that are usually, but not necessarily, in a language other than English. There has also been a corresponding academic interest in world cinema, so that a large number of UK universities now offer film and media studies courses, some originally focussing on British and American cinemas, but now often incorporating a world cinema studies element.

Within the University of London there are a number of colleges and schools offering world/national cinema studies as part of their film and cinema studies courses. As well as SOAS, some of the other University of London colleges offering world cinema studies include:

Goldsmith's Department of Media & Communications
<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-communications/> ;

Birkbeck's School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media
<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hafvm/>

Queen Mary's School of Languages, Linguistics and Film
<http://www.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/filmstudies/>

Royal Holloway's Department of Media Arts <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/media-arts/>

King's College London's Film Studies Department
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/20/82/FlimStudies.pdf>;

University College London's Centre for Intercultural Studies
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/filmstudies/>

These, and other University of London colleges, have come together to form the University Of London's Screen Studies Group <http://screenstudies.sas.ac.uk/>

As well as European national cinema, South Asian (particularly Bollywood), Chinese (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), Japanese (including anime), Arabic and Iranian cinemas have a dedicated following in the UK. Some films are seen as too specialist or obscure for wider commercial release and are limited to release in art-house cinemas or shown at film festivals.

Some individual films are popular successes on commercial release in the UK, recent commercial successes include the animated Iranian film *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi, 2007) and the Franco-Tunisian film *Couscous (La Graine et Le Millet)* (Abdel Kechiche, 2007).

Some film genres are aimed at a particular audience, usually linguistic or ethnic, such as Bollywood films. However, Bollywood cinema in the UK, once seen as a niche (but not commercially insignificant) market, has a growing UK audience beyond the original British South Asian communities in the UK, helped by crossover films such as a Bollywood-style interpretation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice (Bride and Prejudice)*, Gurinder Chadha, 2004) and the rising profile of such cinema in the mainstream media through reporting on events such as the 2007 International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) showcase of cinema held in the northern English cities of Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, York and Hull in 2007.

There are also films produced and/or directed by Asians or Asian diaspora filmmakers such as *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, 1992) and *Bend it like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002); *My Son the Fanatic* (Udayan Prasad/Hanif Kureshi, 1997). Other films that have a British Asian slant such as *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears/Hanif Kureshi, 1985) are sometimes categorised under diaspora or world cinema.

The popularity and awareness of world cinema is reflected in the growing amount of information available on the subject, both in print and on the Web - from Bollywood *filmi* fanzines to more serious organisations such as the British Film Institute (BFI) <http://www.bfi.org.uk/>. There is also a growing range of English language academic publications on Asian and other world cinema published in the UK, elsewhere in the EU, in North America as well as in Asia itself. Publishers such as the British Film Institute, Zed Books (<http://www.zedbooks.co.uk>) and Intellect Books (<http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/>) as well as a number of university presses in Europe, the US and Asia have published in the field, but it is only since 1990 that significant academic research on South East Asian cinema has been undertaken and published. (See bibliography below)

South East Asian films have a more limited appeal and are less widely distributed in the UK, but even here there have been commercial successes such as the Thai films องค์บาก / *Ong Bak / Thai Warrior* (Prachya Pinkaew, 2003); ฟ้าทะลายโจร / *Fah talai jone / Tears of the Black Tiger* (Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000) and สัตว์ประหลาด / *Sat pralat / Tropical malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004); and Vietnamese films such as *Scent of green papaya / Mùi du d'u xanh* (Trần Anh Hùng, 1993) and *Cyclo* (Trần Anh Hùng, 1995), *Three Seasons / Ba Mùa* (Tony Bui, 1999) and *The Buffalo Boy / Mùa len trâu* (Minh Nguyen-Vo, 2004)

Others films such as สุดเสนาหา *Sud sanaeha / Blissfully yours* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2002), นางนาก / *Nang nak* (Nonzee Nimibutr, 1999), โอเค เบตง / *OK Baytong* (Nonzee Nimibutr, 2003), หมานคร / *Ma Nakhon / Citizen dog* (Wisit Sasanatieng, 2004), เฟค โกหกทั้งเพ / *Fake* (Prachya Pinkaew, 2003) and ช็อกโกแลต / *Chocolate* (Prachya Pinkaew, 2008) from Thailand and Royston Tan's Singapore films *4:30* (2006), *15* (2003) and *881* (2007) have had a more limited release in the UK, either being shown in art house cinemas such as at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) <http://www.ica.org.uk> or shown at film festivals such as at the London Film Festival <http://www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/fff/>; the London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival <http://www.bfi.org.uk/lfgff/> and the Singapore Season Film Week held in London in 2005 http://www.mica.gov.sg/pressroom/press_050215.html.

Other films have been popular and commercial successes in their home countries, such as the Singaporean films *Forever fever* (Glen Goei, 1998), *Chicken rice war* (Chee Kong Cheah, 2000), *Xiao hai bu ben / I not stupid* (Liang Zhiqiang aka Jack Neo, 2002) and *Singapore dreaming* (Woo Yen Yen, 2006) and the Malaysian films *Sepet* (Yasmin Ahmad, 2004), *Gubra* (Yasmin Ahmad, 2005), *Mushkin* (Yasmin Ahmad, 2007) and *Mei li de xi yi ji / The beautiful washing machine* (James Lee, 2004) but have not been widely released out-side of South East Asia.

As well as the Thai films listed above, horror films have always been popular in Thailand and recent releases include ชัตเตอร์ กดติดวิญญาณ / *Shutter* (Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parpoom Wongpoom, 2004) and แฟด / *Fad / Alone* (Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parpoom Wongpoom, 2007)

Indonesian film has limited distribution outside Indonesia, other than in Malaysia and Singapore, where Malay speakers understand Indonesian. Horror is a genre that has, like elsewhere in South East Asia, always been popular in Indonesia, and includes such recent releases as *Rumah pondok indah* (Irwan Siregar, 2006), *Kuntilanak* (Rizal Mantovani, 2006), *Lewat tengah malam* (Koya Pagayo, 2007) and *Kuntilanak 2* (Rizal Mantovani, 2007). Romantic comedies and romantic dramas are also popular including recent releases such as *Arisan!* (Nia Dinata, 2003), *Eiffel I'm in love* (Nasri Cheppy, 2003), *30 hari mencari cinta* (Upi Avianto, 2004), *Apa artinya cinta?* (Sunil Soraya) 2005 and *Realita cinta dan rock 'n' roll* (Upi Avianto, 2006).

Film and cinema studies programmes covering South Asian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese film are offered elsewhere in the UK but SOAS is unique in offering courses in South East Asian film and cinema studies. The two main areas of current teaching and research at SOAS are in Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean cinema and in Thai cinema. There is also an interest in Vietnamese film.

Related to these national cinemas are films about South East Asia, such as *Saint Jack* (Bogdanovich, 1979) set in Singapore; *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Weir, 1982) set in Indonesia and *Indochine* (Wagnier, 1992) set in Indochina/Vietnam. By far the largest genre of Hollywood films set in South East Asia are films about the Vietnam War such as *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978); *Apocalypse now* (Coppola, 1979); *Platoon* (Stone, 1986); *Full metal jacket* (Kubrick, 1987) and *The Quiet American* (Noyce, 2002).

SOAS Library's film collections are strongest on Indonesian, Malaysian & Singaporean and Thai cinema, reflecting current research and teaching interests. At SOAS South East Asian film studies are offered either in the Department of the Languages and Cultures of South East Asia or in the Centre for Media and Film Studies.

SOAS is able to call upon academic and library staff with linguistic and other expertise relating to South East Asia to support South East Asian film studies. Courses are supported by a range of library resources, both print and online, relating to South East Asia cinema in particular and on film studies in general. A major resource is the growing collection of actual films (either on DVD or VCD) from South East Asia.

There are three main resources the library provides to support South East Asian film and cinema studies: (i) The print collections (both monographs and journals); (ii) online resources including full-text journal databases and links to resources on the WWW; and (iii) finally, and perhaps most importantly, SOAS Library holds a unique (certainly within the UK and Europe) collection of South East Asian films. Most films are made available on DVD or VCD, some older films are available on VHS video. The Library is investigating the possibility of providing films online by streaming but there are issues of IT capacity and support and more problematic, the issue of copyright and licensing films for online access.

Acquiring books from South East Asia is usually straight forward. Publication and bibliographic data is available through printed and online publishers' and booksellers' catalogues, through national bibliographies and through national and university libraries' online catalogues. SOAS Library uses established book suppliers such as Select Books in Singapore, Nibondh & Co. in Bangkok, Xunhasaba in Hanoi and Solidaridad in Manila. SOAS Library also subscribes to the National Library of Australia's Indonesian Acquisitions Program, in order to acquire Indonesian publications.

Finding information about film on DVD and VCD is more problematic. Booksellers do not usually include films in their catalogues, so it is often difficult to know what is available. Booksellers are also usually either not willing or are unable to acquire VCDs and DVDs, although the National Library of Australia's Jakarta office has been able to obtain specific Indonesian DVDs when asked to. Sourcing, selecting and

acquiring films is much more complicated than acquiring books from South East Asia. Some films have limited release and if a DVD/VCD is not acquired in the first few months of release it may well be unobtainable.

A number of works on national cinema, such as *Malaysian cinema, Asian film : border crossings and national cultures* (2002) and *Latent images : film in Singapore* (2000) include a filmography (a list, often annotated, of films). There are also film catalogues such as the *Katalog film Indonesia, 1926-2007* for Indonesian films. These publications are useful tools to check what films have been produced.

Some films, particularly older classic works, such as the Malay language Singapore and Malayan/ Malaysian films produced by Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Kris in the 1950s and 1960s are available on VCD and DVD and can be easily found in DVD stores and street stalls in Malaysia and Singapore.

More recent releases, that are often only commercially available for short periods and only available within the country of production, can be difficult to obtain and are often only acquired by academic staff or the South East Asia librarian visiting South East Asia and purchasing what is available in DVD stores in Bangkok, Jakarta, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

SOAS academics with an interest in Thai film (Rachel Harrison) and Indonesian film (Ben Murtagh) buy DVDs/VCDs when in Thailand or Indonesia. As they make visits perhaps every 12-18 months, SOAS Library has been able to build up a comprehensive collection on Thai and Indonesian cinema. Nicholas Martland, the Librarian for South Asia, South East Asia & Pacific Studies, makes occasional visits to Singapore and Malaysia and has been able to develop the collection of both older and contemporary Singaporean and Malaysian film.

Academic staff inform the Library that they are visiting the region and intend to purchase DVDs or VCDs. The Library reserves the funding – usually between £100.00 and £200.00 (€125,00 and €250,00) – to cover the purchase of the items and shipping costs. On receipt of the items, the Library reimburses the staff member.

Most VCDs bought in South East Asia cost between €3,00 and €7,00 each; while DVDs are priced between €5,00 and €15,00. The Library will sometimes buy a second copy, so that one copy of a VCD/DVD is available for loan to SOAS staff and students, and the second copy is kept for reference use only and acts as a back-up copy.

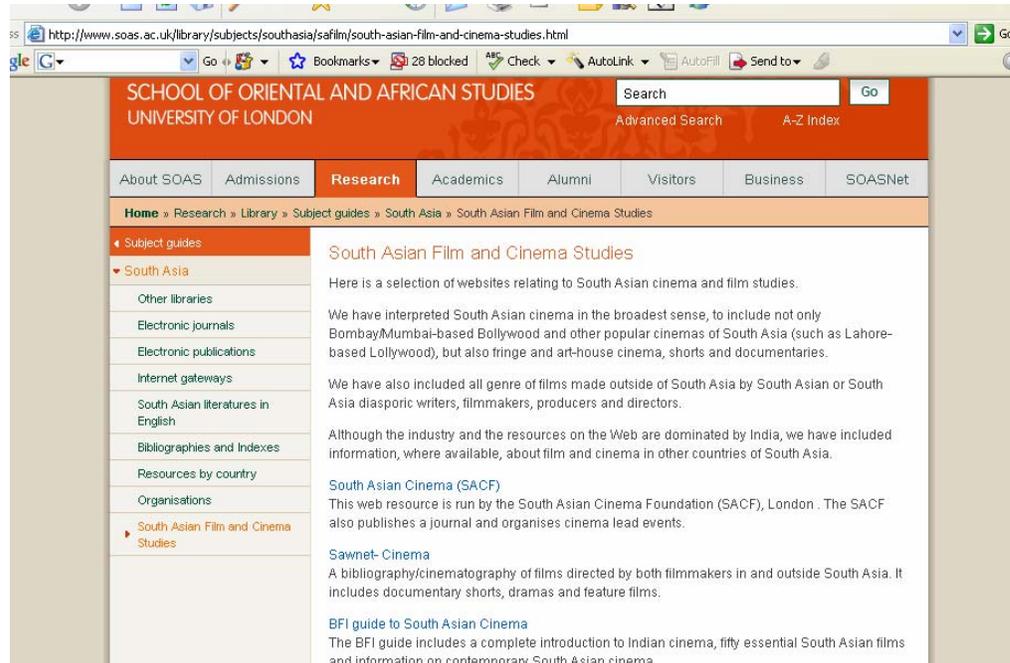
The Library holds more than 50 Malaysian/Singaporean films; more than 100 Thai films; more than 300 Indonesian films and about 50 films relating to Vietnam (some are Vietnamese films although many are Hollywood Vietnam War films).

Although SOAS Library can depend on established suppliers for books and journals, sourcing and acquiring films on VCD and DVD has been more difficult. Established book-suppliers rarely deal with DVDs and VCDs and DVD stores in Asia do not have

a tradition of dealing with institutional buyers. SOAS Library therefore will continue to depend on library and academic staff visiting South East Asia to buy DVDs and VCDs.

The Library plans to develop a subject guide website on South East Asian cinema and film similar to the one it has developed for South Asian film:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/subjects/southasia/safilm/south-asian-film-and-cinema-studies.html>



Record: [Next](#)

TITLE **Mukhsin [videorecording] / written and directed by Yasmin Ahmad ; produced by Ahmad Puad Onah.**

LOCATION	CLASSMARK	LOAN PERIOD	STATUS
Main Library	MDVD /6321	REFERENCE ONLY	AVAILABLE

IMPRINT Kuala Lumpur : Dragon Jester Entertainment, [2006]

DESCRIPT 1 videodisc (ca. 90 min.) : sd., col. ; 4 3/4 in.

NOTE Prequel to [Sepet](#).
Title from disc label.
Sharifah Amani Yahya, Mohd Syafie Naswip, Sharifah Amani Yahya, D.V.D.
In Malay; subtitles in Malay, English and Chinese.

SUBJECT [Feature films -- Malaysia.](#)
[Motion pictures -- Malaysia.](#)

ALT AUTHOR [Ahmad Puad Onah.](#)
[Yasmin Ahmad.](#)
[Sharifah Amani Yahya.](#)

Searching the SOAS online catalogue for films.

Under keyword or subject heading key in these terms: "Feature films + country" or "Motion pictures + country"

Nicholas Martland

4 July 2008

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